

“Now, About Spiritual Gifts...-Part Two

Introduction

For those of you who were not here last week and especially for our guests, let me explain that this is our second week of a ten week spiritual growth campaign that bears the name, “**Spiritual Growth through Spiritual Gifts.**”

The campaign has two major components. I am preaching a series of ten sermons on Spiritual Gifts in which I am trying to unpack and explain this very broad subject in such a way so that children, teenagers, 20 something’s and 80 something’s can all understand. We have also organized 27 plus small groups that are meeting all over the city in homes and working their way through a small group curriculum of the same name so that the membership of FCC can get our heads around this again very broad subject of spiritual gifts.

Paul writes in 1st Corinthians 12:1 “*Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.*” Apparently there was a great deal of ignorance regarding spiritual gifts in the congregation at Corinth. Ignorance in and of itself probably was enough of a concern to Paul but that wasn’t the real problem. The ignorance was opening a door for all kinds of abuse and misuse of spiritual gifts in that congregation.

Many of you have confessed that you are in some ways in the same place as those Corinthian Christians. You have indicated that you don't understand spiritual gifts either. For example, you have indicated that you didn't know what a spiritual gift was, where it came from or what purpose it was to be used. You've actually said to me that if you were asked to make a list of the spiritual gifts that the Bible describes, you'd have to tell whoever asked you that question that you'd have to get back with them. In particular, a lot of you have indicated that you have no clue as to what your spiritual gifts are. You know that other people have spiritual gifts but as far as yourself, you're just not sure.

And in particular, not a few of you have expressed genuine fear and anxiety over some of the spiritual gifts that the Bible talks about. What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee. Psalms 56:3 Don't be afraid, just trust that God will use this study to help us understand

And because you are in some ways in the same place as those Corinthian Christians, we are also vulnerable to the same kind of abuse and misuse of the spiritual gifts that was occurring in Corinth. Any time there is ignorance and confusion, that ignorance and confusion opens a door for our Enemy to do what he does best, to kill, steal and to destroy. He will take your ignorance and use it to kill your desire to serve Christ. He'll use it to steal your passion for loving Christ and your compassion for those in need around you. He'll use it to destroy the unity and harmony that God intends to characterize our congregation.

That is why last Sunday and this Sunday and really for all ten Sundays I am going to be doing less preaching and more teaching. Ignorance is addressed by teaching. We are going to spend ten weeks learning about

spiritual gifts. And really in ten weeks we can only scratch the surface of this subject.

Last Sunday we used the first eleven verses of the twelfth chapter of 1st Corinthians to come up with what I described to you as a working definition of spiritual gifts. By the way, it's printed in your outline so you can remember it. Read it with me.

Spiritual gifts are unique abilities or endowments given by the Holy Spirit to each Christian in community for God's plan and purposes.

This morning we are going to move farther into Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in that twelfth chapter of 1st Corinthians to see how these spiritual gifts that we have each been given function in the church. The key verse is verse twelve. The Message translation of the Bible translates v. 12 this way:

“You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body.” Verse 12

We are going to add to our understanding of spiritual gifts this morning by means of this comparison that Paul makes of the church with the physical human body.

Without further ado, let's dig in. The first thing Paul notes when he looks at his physical body is that:

1. The physical body is made up of many parts.

Paul looked at the human body and saw an amazing combination of parts each one very different from the other parts and yet each part had a unique and essential role to play in a healthy body. There were hands and feet, eyes and ears, fingers and toes.

About the only thing that has changed since Paul looked at his body and we look at ours is that we have discovered that the body is a much more complex organism than Paul understood. The hand is an incredibly complex amalgamation of parts itself. First there are fingers and each finger is made up of several digits and then you have skin and bones and blood vessels and nerves and tendons and muscles. And then those parts of this part are themselves made up of an almost infinite number of cells of an amazing variety and those cells are made up of a nucleus and the rest of the cell and even the nucleus is made up of a variety of parts and those parts of the nucleus can be further broken down into components themselves. And let one of those parts of our hand become diseased or broken and cease to fulfill its unique and essential function and the whole hand quickly becomes diseased and or broken itself and let our hand become broken and/or diseased and suddenly we become aware of how essential its function is to the proper functioning of our bodies.

Paul uses this feature of the human body to help the Corinthians understand how spiritual gifts were to work in the church. It is a lesson that we need to learn as well.

We typically think of the church as an **organization** like the Garden Club or the Kiwanis club and because of that we think that we are free to

participate at whatever level of participation we want to. If we want to be really active that good and if we want to be inactive that's ok too. If we want to be very active and be on the board and on a committee and help with work days and teach a Sunday school class that perfectly acceptable but if we just want to attend occasionally that ok also. The choice really is up to us.

But if as Paul says the church is less like an organization and more like an organism, then suddenly we are not as free to pick and choose our level of activity as we thought we were.

If the church is the body of Christ and each of us has been given a spiritual gift and my spiritual gift is analogous to one part of the physical body within the body of Christ or the Church then my participation suddenly becomes very important. Like a body needs all of its parts present and engaged so the church needs all of her parts present and engaged.

Do you see why ignorance of spiritual gifts was such a concern to Paul?

My spiritual gift of shepherding is like a toe and your spiritual gift of encouraging is like an eye and your spiritual gift of mercy is like an ear. Each of us has spiritual gifts and each of our spiritual gifts has an unique and essential roles to play in the life of the congregation which is the body of Christ.

Look at verses 27-28 with me.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles,...” Verses 27-28

So the first learning here is that the body of Christ is created out of a variety of spiritual gifts each of which has its own unique and essential role to play in the life of the body of Christ or the church.

Perhaps you're also beginning to see why ignorance of spiritual gifts is such a concern of mine and why I've gone to such great lengths to alleviate the ignorance that exists within our church.

In the first lesson in small groups all of us took a “Spiritual Gift Inventory.” What that inventory will help us to begin to understand is what part of the body of Christ, you were created to be. Am I a hand? Am I a foot? Am I a leg?

If the body of Christ is a complex creation made up of a variety of parts, if I am going to be a part of that body then I need to know what part I am.

Our second learning is that

2. The individual parts lose their value when separated from the body.

The individual parts of a physical body are of little value when they are separated from the body to which they were intended to be joined. A hand apart from the body to which it was joined by God can't do a whole lot. It will just lie there motionless and in reality it will be lifeless disconnected

from the body to which it was intended to be joined. The various parts of our bodies were intended to remain connected to the whole body and functioning together so that the whole body will be healthy and able to do all that God intends for it to do.

Paul makes this point in a rather graphic way. Look at verse 21.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ Verse 21

Paul is saying that if the eye were to say to the hand, I don’t need you and somehow disconnect itself from the hand, really disconnect itself from the body it wouldn’t be able to see anymore because it can only see because it is connected to the optic nerve and the optic nerve is connected to the brain. The other two parts are necessary to it in order for it to fulfill its function.

In reality the eye wouldn’t be able to disconnect itself from the hand without the hand’s help so its dependence upon the rest of the body is again underscored.

In the same manner if the head were to say to the foot, I don’t need you then the head would need the hand’s help in disconnecting the foot from itself.

Here’s another way of looking at it. If I take an ax and cut off my finger and separate it from my body, the finger won’t be able to move as it did when it was attached to my body and it won’t be able to perform its vital functions of helping to pick things up and to feel because it will be

separated from the other parts of the body that it cooperates with in order to fulfill its functions.

In reality if I were to do that it wouldn't be long before my finger would die. And if it stays separate from my body for an extended period of time, it will begin to deteriorate and decompose. The reality is that the individual parts of the body cannot live apart from being connected to the body.

Paul is underscoring the essential dependence that the body has on each of its parts and the essential dependence each of the parts has on the other parts of the body.

In the same way, your spiritual gift is designed to work together with my spiritual gift in the body of Christ. The moment you separate your spiritual gift from the body it cannot function and if you separate it long enough from the body of Christ it will die because it is cut off from its source of life.

Your spiritual gift begins to lose its value the moment it is separated from the body of Christ which is the church.

The truth of this analogy is obvious. Let's say your spiritual gift is teaching. In the Greek New Testament this gift is called "didaskalia." According to our study guide the gift of teaching is the ability to clearly explain the Christian faith and to equip others to apply those truths to their daily lives both by your words and your actions. Let's say you have that gift.

If you separate yourself from the body of Christ which is the church which is the assembly of those people who are born anew by water and the Spirit, it is the group of people who earnestly desire to live the Christian life, who are you going to teach? If you have separated yourself from those who want to learn the trust of the Christian faith, where and with whom will you exercise your spiritual gift of teaching?

Here's another example. Let's say your spiritual gift is the gift of discernment. According to our study guide the gift of discernment is the ability to distinguish false teachings from true, good from evil intentions, right from wrong actions. The Greek words for this gift are "diakris pneumatou" which literally means "the discernment of spirits." Christians with this gift protect the spiritual health of the body of Christ by being able to discern whether or not those who lead the church lead from the right motives. They protect the spiritual health of the body of Christ by being able to discern those who faithfully communicate the truths of the Bible from those who seek only their own gain.

If you have the gift of discernment and you separate yourself from the body of Christ, then who will you protect by the exercise of your gift?

Let's move on. A third insight here is that

3. The body without any of its individual parts is handicapped.

This is just common sense. A part of the physical body separated from the rest of that body is of little value. Additionally a body without all of its parts is less than God intended for it to be.

Look at verses 17-18.

“If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” Verse 17-18

One of the saddest occurrences in human experience is for a young person to lose one of their limbs or one of their eyes or their sense of hearing. People will shake their heads and say, “Now he or she will never become all that they could have become.”

One of the greatest fears that people who have diabetes often have is that they will lose one of their extremities due to poor circulation.

The same principal applies in the realm of spiritual gifts. If you take your spiritual gift and go home, Paul argues that you suffer because a part separated from the body is of little value. But of even greater significance, he also argues that the body suffers because a body without all its parts is less than God intended for it to be.

Or let's say you don't take your gift and go home but you have this gift but don't exercise or use it in the Church then the body of Christ is less than God intended for it to be.

Let's say for example, your gift is that of “teaching,” or “didaskalia” and you say to yourself, “I don't want to teach. I've been teaching for 15 years. It's time for someone else to step up and teach for a while. I want to take a break.” What happens? Because you are not offering your gift to

the body of Christ, the body of Christ/the Church is less than God intended for it to be.

Another example, let's say your spiritual gift is the gift of healing—"iamata" in the New Testament Greek. According to our study material this is the miraculous capacity to bring God's healing to others, healing that surpasses ordinary human experience. Christians with the gift of healings do not just apply therapeutic techniques and medicines—they are vessels for extraordinary power. They can bring this gift in different ways—by anointing with oil, by prayer, by touch, or by words. They restore wholeness where there was brokenness. Those who are healed experience God's grace and goodness.

This is important. The gift is not a spectacle—it is a sign of God's love and power. Christians with this gift know that it is not them who heal, but God working through them.

When this gift is absent from the body of Christ, the body of Christ does not see in tangible and real ways these signs of God's love and power. The body of Christ, the Church is then less than God created it to be.

Our final learning is that

4. When all of the parts function together in harmony the body matures and grows.

In the physical realm, when all of the parts of my body are functioning properly and cooperating harmoniously with all the other parts of my body, that body is healthy and it will mature and grow just as God intended for it to.

In the same way, when all of the parts of Christ's body, the Church are functioning properly and cooperating harmoniously with all of the other parts of Christ's body, His body is healthy and it will mature and grow just as God intended for it to.

Look at verses 24-25

“But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division.”

There are a variety of levels of physical health and fitness. There are also different kinds of growth.

I have a body. All of its parts are functioning normally and cooperatively but it's not all that physically fit.

Blake has a body. All of its parts are functioning normally and cooperatively and it's a lot more physically fit.

Last Sunday we watched two group of very gifted athletes play a football game. Their bodies were functioning normally and cooperatives and they were honed to as near absolute perfection as a physical body can get.

I don't imagine any of us would want to argue that the way in which our bodies are functioning is adequate for the Body of Christ.

Conclusion

This reminds me of the man who stopped to weigh himself on a weighing machine. He put the coin in, drew the ticket out, and was obviously pleased. He handed it to his wife, and she read it aloud: "You are dynamic, a born leader, handsome, admired by women for your personality." She added, "It's got your weight wrong, too."

Whether you boldly change your diet; or scrooch back and forth in front of your television on one of those exercise machines; or faithfully jog three miles every morning; getting in shape is one of America's great pastimes. Some might call it an obsession. But who can argue against health and fitness? The alternative is certainly not very appealing.

Before we quit let's go back to where we started. According to Paul's own words there was a great deal of ignorance regarding spiritual gifts in the congregation at Corinth and that ignorance was opening a door for all kinds of abuse and misuse of spiritual gifts in that congregation.

If we are in some measure in the same place as those Corinthian Christians, we are also vulnerable to the same kind of abuse and misuse of the spiritual gifts that was occurring in Corinth. Any time there is ignorance and confusion, that ignorance and confusion opens a door for our Enemy to do what he does best, to kill, steal and to destroy. He will take your ignorance and use it to kill your desire to serve Christ. He'll use it to steal your passion for loving Christ and your compassion for those in need around you. He'll use it to destroy the unity and harmony that God intends to characterize our congregation.

So let's move on from where we are, a place of ignorance, to a place of full understanding and a proper exercise of the spiritual gifts that God has

given to us so that we as a congregation can mature and grow until we all attain the full measure of the maturity of Christ.